

17 October 1975

ISSUE: HOW BEST TO PRODUCE NATIONAL AND OTHER INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES

A. Congressional Committee Positions

1. SSC

- a. SSC Staff revisiting NIEs over long period and exploring history and problems of estimates' production.
- b. Several former ranking CIA officials (e.g., John McCone) have argued for a BNE in interviews with Senate Staff.
- c. Senator Mondale has publicly argued for re-creating BNE, reflecting some SSC Staff sentiments.

2. HSC

a. Position not known. Inference from numerous questions addressed to Wilson-Hyland [REDACTED] was that several members have high opinion of old-style NIEs and methods of producing them, believe NIOs are too engaged in day-to-day business for systematic long-term thinking, are skeptical that NIOs have sufficient authority or influence in Agency/Community to get the job done, and wonder about their ability to withstand policy pressures on estimates.

b. On other hand, two HSC staffers who have been briefed on NIO system and are studying estimates have professed themselves impressed with it and with steps being taken to improve it.

B. Discussion of Options

1. This question tends to be debated in either/or terms, i.e., "Are NIOs better than BNE or visa versa?" This is probably a false dichotomy, certainly an unnecessarily restrictive one. One may wish to choose either an NIO or a BNE system; one does not have to. In terms of rhetoric and symbols, there is a tendency on the Hill and in parts of press to glamorize the BNE as synonymous with objectivity

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and wisdom, NIOs with the obverse. Whatever our personal inclinations, no knowledgeable person thinks in these simplistic terms. The matter is further complicated by charges (Mondale speech) that Nixon caused the abolition of BNE for ideological reasons -- charges which are not true.

2. In actuality, the NIOs were set up in 1973 to perform a cluster of functions deriving from the DCI's mandate to lead the Community, and from Mr. Colby's own felt need for close substantive support in certain geographical and functional areas. Their responsibilities include production of NIEs and other estimates, but many other things as well. Their NIE responsibilities were assigned partly to offset charges that ONE had too monopolistic a role in drafting NIEs.

3. The BNE was established in 1951 to produce National Estimates period. As it evolved, and as it developed a sophisticated staff, it broadened its activities to include a variety of analytical and estimative functions and speculative work in addition to NIEs -- both coordinated within the Community and unilaterally for the DCI or at his request.

4. Thus, NIO and ONE functions overlap in part but only in part.

a. NIOs do a variety of staff support jobs for the DCI, look at substantive affairs from his point of view, are active in consumer relations and in grey area between substance and management (KIQ-REP, etc.). The NIOs and their assistants are specialists in their subjects of responsibility -- though broad-gauged specialists. They employ regular production offices in CIA and elsewhere to get jobs done. Personnel is drawn from senior- and middle-level substantive experts of CIA, State and the services, with some infusion of talent from outside government.

b. ONE was based on concept of small group of very senior generalists, civilian and military, removed from current and administrative responsibilities, charged with thinking ahead substantively. They served, individually and collectively, as the DCI's executive agents for producing National Estimates and other estimative products. BNE was supported by small substantive staff which did the drafting, helped by departmental contributions. As ONE evolved, relative importance of staff grew.

5. Whether considered empirically in the light of experience or conceptually, NIO and BNE systems each show a mixture of advantages and disadvantages, with preponderance depending on which cluster of functions one considers most important.

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### Lessons from Experience

a. Little doubt in light of 'two years' experience that the DCI, charged with present mandate to lead the Community, needs something like NIOs as substantive staff officers. Would probably need them all the more if he or a super-senior intelligence officer receives a strengthened mandate for leadership of the Community. NIOs, as a channel between policy consumers and intelligence producers, have also proved their usefulness in making intelligence more responsive to consumer needs and in helping the DCI prioritize Community's substantive effort.

b. Also little doubt, in light of experience, that NIOs do not have enough time and staff support to deal systematically with long-term problems. They have had difficulty getting quality estimates drafted -- especially when problem cuts across geographic specialties, when outside agencies asked to do job, or when time pressures are urgent. Press of daily responsibilities is not compatible with the sustained attention needed for thoughtful long-run estimating. Sustained proximity to high policymakers could interfere with rigorous independence and with the challenging of conventional wisdom and short-term conveniences, etc., which is one of the functions of objective long-term estimates. (In practice, there has been little evidence of such interference, and NIOs independence has been vigorously asserted when the need arose.)

### The Range of Options

a. Conceptually, these range from the extreme of keeping the present NIO system without a staff to abolishing it in favor of an enhanced BNE. The sensible options probably lie between these poles and admit of many design variations in terms of composition, function, administrative location, subordination, etc. Illustratively, these variations include:

(1) Clarify and reinforce NIO's authority to commandeer drafting and other substantive support from all appropriate CIA offices and other agencies. no

(2) Organize a drafting staff for the NIOs. no

(3) Make the NIOs a more collegial substantive body to strengthen capacity for estimates which cross geographical or functional lines.

(4) Establish a substantive review group drawn from CIA, State, DOD and outside -- convening regularly or on call -- to review estimates prepared under NIO auspices. ?

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(5) Establish an office of estimates apart from but parallel with the NIOs. Would be composed of a small group of senior generalists with a small substantive staff for drafting and specialized support, both elements drawn from within and outside the Community, to act as executive agent for estimates' production, quality control mechanism and long range think tank. It would free NIOs for customer relations, substantive and quasi-management duties in support of the DCI or senior intelligence officers, etc.

(6) Establish an enhanced Board of Estimates, complete with "eminent and highly qualified intelligence analysts, diplomats and statesmen... not susceptible to White House or parochial agency pressure." (Mondale) Give it a strong staff which, inter alia, would perform many of present NIO functions.

#### C. Recommendations

N.B. Any recommendations on this issue must take account of the DCI's needs, the climate in the White House and on the Hill, and past experience and anticipated requirements. No two people will see these in precisely the same light. Considering all the factors, two alternatives seem sensible:

*Is change per se needed?*

1. B5(5) above (an office of estimates parallel with the NIO structure). This has the merit of real and visible change (intrinsically desirable in present context) but not too much change. It is sufficiently flexible to meet all or most of the desiderata associated with other options. It would cost some money and plots not presently available, and these would have to come out of other resources being cut back. It should be headed up by someone, ideally an outside civilian, not identified with DNE or NIO system; who could claim confidence of Congress and academic/think tank community as well as of the DCI and executive branch. Its working relationship with the NIOs would need precise and thoughtful clarification.

2. A mixture of B5 (2, 3, 4) above (drafting staff for NIOs, a more collegial NIO process, and a review group for quality control and generalist perspective.) This would build on present structure and help repair present deficiencies. It would cost somewhat less than the other recommended option. It would help free the NIOs for what they do best. It would be criticized as cosmetic tinkering rather than real change, but that criticism would not be fatal.

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D. Proposed Action

Neither of these steps would require legislation and either could be accomplished by executive order or DCI directive. Unless and until the DCI concurs in one of these recommendations, or directs another line of approach, there is no basis for action. If he should approve either of the recommended approaches, a small task force should be established to blueprint a workable plan. Group should initially include representatives of NIO office, ICS, DDT, perhaps DD/A. A second phase would involve elements of the Community. Planning phase could be accomplished in a couple of weeks.

*- NIO system resulted primarily from this DCI's feeling of personal need -- better he feeling of personal experience in substantial matters.*

*- This paper assumes that all NIOs operate in much the same way -- re. NIEs, contacts with policymakers, interface with analysts, etc. These are obviously not true.*

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